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SUBJECT: COLOMBIA COMPLIES WITH 2005 IACHR RECOMMENDATION;  
ACCEPTS RESPONSIBILITY FOR 1989 MURDER OF TWELVE OFFICIALS

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Summary  
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1. The Colombian Government formally accepted responsibility September 29 for the 1989 murder of 12 members of a GOC judicial commission at La Rochela by paramilitary forces, working in collaboration with elements of the GOC military. The Colombian Government's acceptance of responsibility on behalf of the Colombian State fulfills one of the principal recommendations of the March 7, 2005 Inter-American Commission on Human Rights report on this matter. End summary.

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The 1989 Murders and the IACHR Investigation  
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2. On January 18, 1989, the Virgilio Barco administration sent a judicial commission to the rural area of La Rochela in Santander Department to investigate alleged paramilitary crimes, including multiple murders, that had occurred in 1987. Paramilitary forces kidnapped and murdered 12 members of the commission; three members pretended to be dead and survived the attack. On October 9, 2002, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) determined that Colombia had a case to answer; on March 7, 2005, the IACHR recommended that Colombia, among other things, "publicly accept the responsibility of the State" for the crimes.

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Colombia Accepts Responsibility, Asks Forgiveness  
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3. On behalf of the Colombian State and in the presence of victims' families and friends, NGO groups, and media representatives at a gathering in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Vice President Francisco Santos recognized the State's responsibility for failing to protect the judicial commission members, and asked the victims' families for forgiveness. Foreign Minister Carolina Barco was present but asked Vice Minister Camilo Reyes to deliver her remarks because she had lost her voice; Reyes, on Barco's behalf, said that Colombia "condemns and deplores" the murders and accepts responsibility for what happened. Santos, Barco, and Reyes were joined on the podium by Defense Minister Camilo Ospina, Prosecutor General Mario Iguaran, president of the Supreme Council of the Judiciary Guillermo Bueno Miranda, president of the Council of State German Rodriguez Villamizar, and Supreme Court president Carlos Isaac Nader.

4. Santos unveiled a large plaque recognizing Colombia's responsibility for the murders. The plaque will be displayed in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs alongside a photo exhibition that honors the victims.

Begin informal Embassy translation of plaque:

The Colombian State profoundly regrets the events of January 18, 1989, in the suburb of La Rochela, in lower Simacota, Santander Department, in which were massacred criminal judges Mariela Morales de Caro and Pablo Antonio Beltran Palomino, with their respective Judicial Commission, composed of Samuel Vargas Paez, Gabriel Enrique Vesga Fonseca, Cesar Augusto Morales Cepeda, Yul German Monroy Ramirez, Carlos Fernando Castillo Zapata, Orlando Morales Cardenas, Virgilio Hernandez Serrano, Benhur Ivan Guasca Castro, Luis Orlando Hernandez Munoz, and Arnulfo Mejia Duarte, during which events three additional personnel survived.

The State recognizes its responsibility for not having taken the necessary measures to guarantee the security and personal integrity of the personnel.

The effectiveness of the Rule of Law requires sufficient security so that justice operates independently and impartially.

End informal Embassy translation.

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Families Laud Loved Ones, GOC Commits to Act Against Paras  
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5. Representatives of the victims' families spoke during the

ceremony about the effect the loss of their loved ones had caused in their lives; some said that they still loved Colombia but called for justice for their families. One family representative, whose father died in the attack, spoke articulately and at length about the need to ensure that both the murderers and their commanders are prosecuted. In his remarks in response, VP Santos said Colombia had convicted seven people for the murders and was investigating an additional three; he characterized paramilitaries as a "force for instability, not stability" in Colombia and said the GOC was committed to dismantling their structures.

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